
OLR Bill Analysis

sSB 927

AN ACT CONCERNING REQUIREMENTS FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATORS.

SUMMARY:

This bill makes several changes to the required qualifications for early childhood educators. It modifies the (1) staff qualification requirements that are in effect until July 1, 2015 and (2) criteria for eligible degree programs and certifications. It specifies that, on and after July 1, 2015, the staff qualification requirements apply to all preschool programs accepting state funds, including school readiness funds and funds from the Department of Social Services (DSS).

The bill also delays, from July 1, 2015 until July 1, 2020, the requirement that programs have a person in each classroom with a bachelor's degree in certain fields or a teaching certificate. It instead requires (1) at least 50% of early childhood educators with primary responsibility for a classroom to meet this requirement by July 1, 2015 and (2) remaining individuals to have an associate's degree. Beginning July 1, 2020, the bill requires all such educators to meet the requirement to have a bachelor's degree or teaching certificate. It requires the Department of Higher Education (DHE) to develop a plan to meet these requirements.

Additionally, the bill specifically allows up to \$500,000 in unexpended school readiness funds each fiscal year to be used in the subsequent fiscal year to help local school readiness programs' staff members meet the degree requirements. It allows staff members to receive up to \$5,000 per year for this purpose.

EFFECTIVE DATE: July 1, 2011

STAFF QUALIFICATIONS

Current Requirements Until July 1, 2015

Under current law until July 1, 2015, each school readiness classroom must have an individual with a (1) credential, associate's degree, or bachelor's degree that included 12 credits or more in early childhood education or child development or (2) a teaching certificate with an endorsement in early childhood education or special education. The credentialing organization must be approved by the education commissioner, and the early childhood education or childhood development credits must be from an institution accredited by the Board of Governors of Higher Education (BGHE) or regionally accredited.

The bill (1) specifies that the credential must be a childhood development associate credential or equivalent; (2) specifies that the early childhood education or child development credits must be determined by the DHE commissioner, in consultation with the education and social services commissioners; and (3) eliminates special education as a qualifying endorsement for a teaching certificate.

Requirements After July 1, 2015

Under current law, after July 1, 2015, each school readiness classroom must have an individual who has (1) a bachelor's degree from an institution accredited by BGHE or regionally accredited in early childhood education, childhood development, or a related field approved by the education commissioner or (2) a teaching certificate with an endorsement in early childhood or special education.

The bill instead requires, from July 1, 2015 to June 30, 2020, that 50% of individuals with primary responsibility for a classroom of children meet the above requirement. Early childhood educators who do not meet this requirement must hold an associate's degree in an eligible field.

The bill also (1) modifies this requirement to cover all preschool programs accepting state funds, including school readiness and DSS funds, and (2) specifies that everyone with primary responsibility for a classroom with children must meet the requirement (current law only requires that one such individual be in the classroom).

Additionally, the bill:

1. eliminates the ability to meet the degree requirement by attending a regionally accredited institution (i.e., one that is out-of-state);
2. eliminates special education as a qualifying endorsement for a teaching certificate;
3. specifies that eligible degree programs are early childhood education, child study, child development, or human growth and development; and
4. requires the programs to be approved by the Department of Education (SDE) and DHE.

Requirements Beginning July 1, 2020

Effective July 1, 2020, the bill requires all, rather than 50%, of the individuals with primary responsibility for a classroom with children to meet the above requirement to have a bachelor's degree or teaching certificate.

Plan Required

The bill requires DHE to develop a plan to meet the bachelor's degree and teaching certificate requirements, including strategies for retaining individuals who do not meet them. It must consult with SDE; DSS; the Office of Workforce Competitiveness; and representatives from (1) public and independent institutions of higher education in Connecticut, (2) early childhood education programs accepting school readiness funds, and (3) any other group or organization DHE deems appropriate.

DHE must submit the plan by February 1, 2012 to the Education and Higher Education committees. From 2013 to 2015, it must submit annual reports (by February 1 each year) to the above committees on the plan's implementation.

SCHOOL READINESS

By law, the education commissioner may use unexpended school readiness funds for several purposes, including professional development for school readiness staff. The bill specifically allows up to \$500,000 in unexpended school readiness funds each fiscal year to be used in the subsequent fiscal year to help local school readiness programs' staff members meet the qualification requirements. It allows staff members to receive up to \$5,000 in assistance per year for courses leading to a bachelor's degree in the fields listed above up to the extent of their financial need. Staff members must (1) have first applied for all available federal and state scholarships and grants and (2) attend a public or nonprofit institution of higher education in Connecticut.

Under the bill, FY 13 is the first year that unexpended funds may be used for this purpose. The SDE commissioner, in consultation with the DHE commissioner, must determine how the unexpended funds are distributed, and local school readiness programs must apply for unexpended funds in their school readiness grant application.

COMMITTEE ACTION

Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee

Joint Favorable Substitute Change of Reference

Yea 20 Nay 0 (03/15/2011)

Education Committee

Joint Favorable Substitute

Yea 32 Nay 0 (03/25/2011)

Appropriations Committee

Joint Favorable Substitute

Yea 49 Nay 2 (04/26/2011)